



# | 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

550 High Street  
Sillers Building - 18th Floor  
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

601-359-5029 | [www.beam.ms.gov](http://www.beam.ms.gov)

@BEAMOffice







# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

## GRANTS

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE  
PROGRAM (BIP).....4

CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND (CPF) .....9

BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND  
DEPLOYMENT (BEAD) ..... 13

DIGITAL SKILLS & ACCESSIBILITY (DSA) ..... 17

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ..... 20

## PARTNERS

HORNE ..... 22

READY.NET ..... 23



December 13, 2024

Dear Legislators,

The BEAM office is charged with awarding and administering over a billion dollars to connect all Mississippians to high-speed internet. BEAM oversees four separate federal grant streams all focused on this goal of connectivity for even the most rural of Mississippians.

The grants administered by BEAM are newly created programs at the federal level, all with varying rules and often fluctuating guidance that must be combined with state legislative requirements. The BEAM Office understands the urgency of this challenging undertaking, and our staff works diligently to move each program forward. Significant accomplishments this year are:

- Close-out and substantial completion of the \$32 million Broadband Infrastructure Program.
- Awarded \$150 Million of ARPA Capital Projects Fund (stood up application portal, scored applications, and deduplicated award areas with existing federal funding).
- Approvals from National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for challenge process and subgrantee selection procedures.
- Completion of Challenge Process to finalize eligible locations.
- Design and completion of Letter of Intent for prequalification process.
- Submission of final list of eligible locations to NTIA.

January 2025 will begin the application phase for the largest and final program to complete buildout to all unserved locations. By early summer 2025, any Mississippians without high-speed internet service will know what provider has the responsibility and funding to build to and serve their home.

Additionally, BEAM's broadband mapping initiative is a critical component of all grant programs. This initiative is a sophisticated and ever-changing data set with an easy to use public facing component. Reliable and accessible data prevents duplicative funding and overbuilding. I invite you to view the state broadband map at [www.beam.ms.gov](http://www.beam.ms.gov) to view your community and see the State as a whole. This map has a multitude of functions and filters and is the best source for service availability in Mississippi.

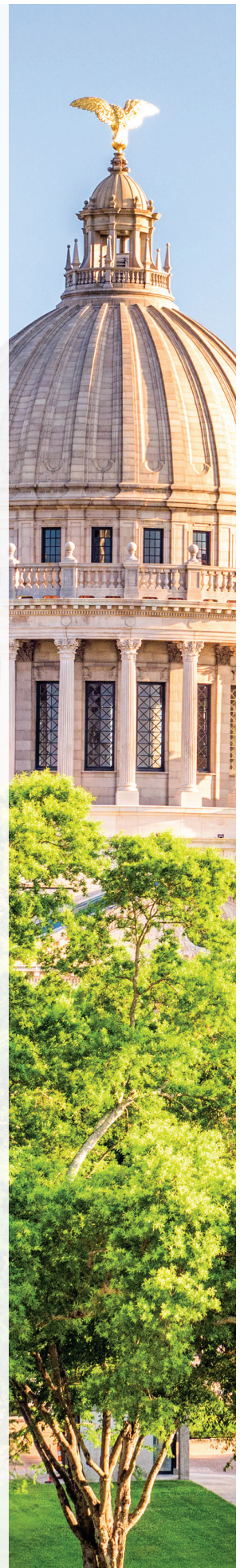
More detailed information on all of these programs can be found throughout this report, and the BEAM staff is always willing to provide information on buildouts and timelines. If you have questions, please call our office at 601-359-5029. You may also email [info@beam.ms.gov](mailto:info@beam.ms.gov) and our staff will respond quickly. I also encourage you to follow our social media for award announcements and updates. You may join our email list to find a wealth of resources and information on our agency website at [www.beam.ms.gov](http://www.beam.ms.gov).



Kindest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Doty".

Sally Burchfield Doty  
Director of BEAM







# BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM (BIP)

The \$32.7 million in Broadband Infrastructure Program funding awarded to BEAM in February 2022 is the first investment in Mississippi broadband administered by the BEAM office. This funding is provided by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Seven projects were applied for and approved in 2022, and construction has been completed on several of these projects. Once all are completed, these seven projects will serve 4,705 households, 1,187 businesses, and 68 community anchor institutions in Calhoun, Coahoma, Covington, Issaquena, Lincoln, Madison, and Smith counties. Many of these projects are now in the grant close-out period, and the remaining projects are nearing completion.

Please see the list below for a brief update on each of these projects.

## **1. TEC - BAY SPRINGS/SMITH COUNTY:**

This project area includes 137 miles of fiber to 805 unserved households, 47 businesses, and 2 community anchor institutions.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 368 households, 5 businesses, 2 community anchor institutions

Left Photo: An Uplink Internet employee manually locating underground water and gas lines during a BIP fiber build in Lula, MS.





Franklin Telephone BIP Groundbreaking event in Lincoln County. Pictured front l-r: Sally Doty, Director of BEAM; Tammy Torrey, Franklin Telephone Operations VP; Gregg Logan, Franklin Telephone VP and General Manager; Ty James, MS Federal Program Officer from NTIA; Wesley Goings, Franklin Telephone President. Back: Franklin Telephone contractors and construction crew.

## **2. BRUCE TELEPHONE COMPANY – CALHOUN COUNTY:**

This project consists of 141 miles of fiber to reach areas of rural Calhoun County, including 1,158 unserved households and 134 businesses.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 531 households, 9 businesses

## **3. CABLESOUTH MEDIA III (SWYFTCONNECT) – COLLINS:**

The project consists of 25 miles using fiber in Covington County and passes 861 unserved households, 468 businesses, and 8 anchor institutions.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 56 households, 2 businesses

## **4. C SPIRE – LIVINGSTON:**

The project installed nine miles of fiber in rural Madison

County and offers service to 115 unserved household locations and 36 businesses.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 86 households

## **5. C SPIRE – MAYERSVILLE:**

The project will cover areas of Issaquena County and the town of Mayersville and pass 120 unserved household locations and 10 businesses.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 85%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: The provider is approximately 80% through fiber build-out. Customers will be able to connect once the buildout is complete.

## **6. FRANKLIN TELEPHONE COMPANY – WEST LINCOLN COUNTY:**

The project includes 52 miles of buried fiber and covers portions of Lincoln County, including 265 unserved household locations and 33 businesses.



- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 76 households, 1 business

### **7. UPLINK, LLC - COAHOMA COUNTY:**

The project will include 114 miles of fiber to reach 1381 unserved households, 459 businesses, and 58 community anchor institutions.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 95%
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: 203 households, 2 businesses

In early 2023, additional funding became available that allowed for five new projects to be added to the BIP program. These five projects will provide service to 2,636 households, 45 businesses, and 28 community anchor institutions across areas of Lincoln/Franklin Counties (Lower Meadville Road and Bude), Pearl River County (Poplarville), and Tunica County (the communities of Clack and Fish Camp).

### **1. CABLESOUTH MEDIA III (SWYFTCONNECT) – POPLARVILLE:**

The project includes approximately 46 miles of buried fiber and, when complete, will offer service to 1,459 unserved household locations.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 5% - Provider experienced a setback that required the project to be redesigned from aerial to buried fiber. This has extended their buildout timeline due to resulting delays from new permitting requirements for the buried fiber.
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: Subrecipient/ISP has not yet started construction due to delays related to permitting requirements.

### **2. FRANKLIN TELEPHONE COMPANY – BUDE:**

This project will cover the town of Bude, and the project consists of 19 miles of buried fiber to approximately 616 households, 45 business locations, and 28 community anchor institutions.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%



CSpire contractors in Livingston, MS work to install buried fiber.

### **3. FRANKLIN TELEPHONE COMPANY – LOWER MEADVILLE ROAD (LINCOLN COUNTY):**

This project consists of one mile of buried fiber in Lincoln County and will provide service to approximately 19 households.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 100%

### **4. UPLINK, LLC – CLACK (TUNICA COUNTY):**

The project will consist of 23.6 miles of fiber passing a total of 344 unserved households.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 80% - Provider is waiting on materials to arrive and splicing to be completed.
- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024: Subrecipient/ISP has not begun connecting customers at this time.

### **5. UPLINK, LLC – FISH CAMP (TUNICA COUNTY):**

The project will construct 11 miles of fiber to a total of 198 unserved households.

- a. Approximate Percentage Completion as of 9/30/2024: 80% - provider is waiting on materials





Franklin Telephone workers preparing to install buried fiber.

to arrive and splicing to be completed.

- b. Customers Connected as of 9/30/2024:  
Subrecipient/ISP has not begun connecting customers at this time.

In 2024, several BIP projects were completed under budget. As such, BEAM rescoped these funds to approve two small additional projects. These two projects will construct a total of 15.5 miles of fiber to connect 156 homes and 20 businesses. These projects were approved by NTIA in late October 2024. Environmental reviews and permitting are underway and construction should begin soon. Please see below for details of the two additional projects.

#### **1. CSPIRE – WEST MADISON COUNTY:**

This project will construct 1.57 miles of fiber to pass 14 homes and 17 businesses in western Madison County.

#### **2. FRANKLIN TELEPHONE – HIGHWAY 84 SOUTH:**

This project includes 14 miles of fiber to pass 141 residences and three businesses in Lincoln County.

**Please see the charts on the following pages for more detailed information on each of these projects' budgets and expenditures as of September 30, 2024.**



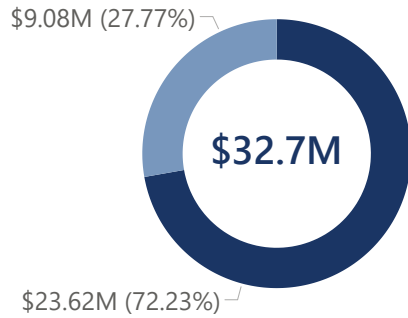
## BIP Approvals & Reimbursements to Date

Subrecipient Name / Project

All

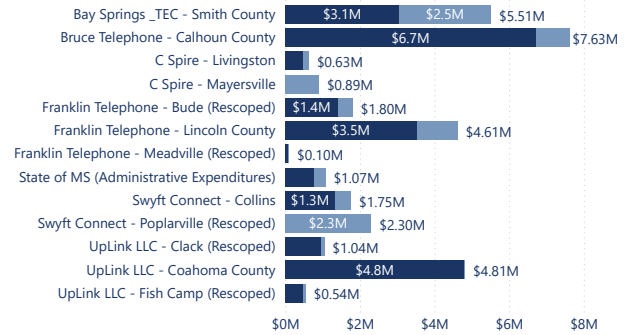
### Approved to Date - BIP Totals

● Approved for Payment ● Remaining Award Amount



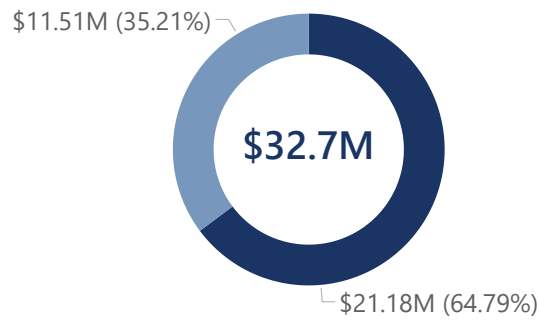
### Approved to Date - ISP Totals

● Approved for Payment ● Remaining Award Amount



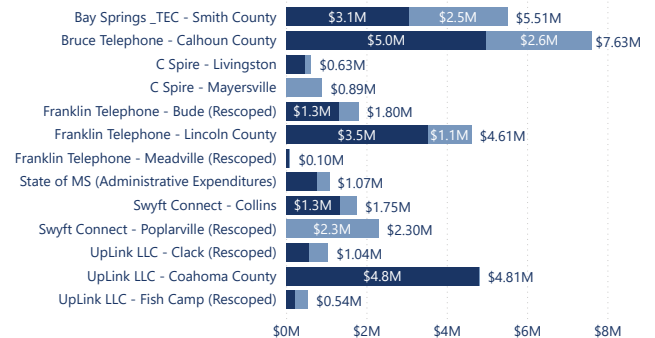
### Reimbursed to Date - BIP Totals

● Reimbursed to Date ● Remaining Award Amount After Payment



### Reimbursed to Date - ISP Totals

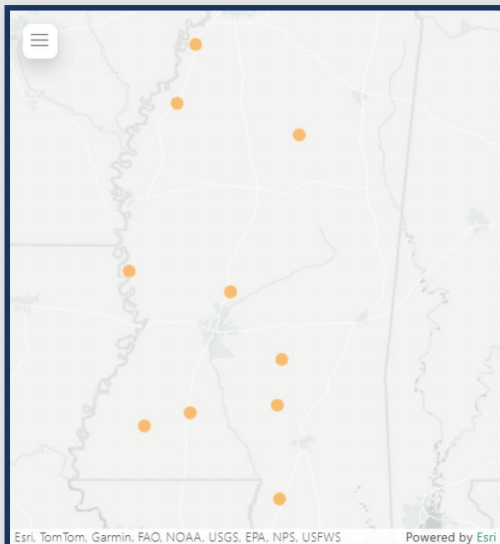
● Reimbursed to Date ● Remaining Award Amount After Payment



## BIP Funding & Reimbursement Totals by Subrecipient

Subrecipient Name / Project

All



Subrecipient Name / Project	Total Federal Award Amount	Federal Funds Reimbursed to Date	Remaining Federal Award Amount
Bay Springs _TEC - Smith County	\$5,507,845.03	\$3,054,572.25	\$2,453,272.78
Bruce Telephone - Calhoun County	\$7,625,074.92	\$4,990,469.35	\$2,634,605.57
C Spire - Livingston	\$625,499.98	\$487,855.94	\$137,644.04
C Spire - Mayersville	\$894,779.97	\$0.00	\$894,779.97
Descoped	\$7,077.50	\$7,077.50	\$0.00
Franklin Telephone - Bude (Rescoped)	\$1,801,748.64	\$1,311,381.52	\$490,367.12
Franklin Telephone - Lincoln County	\$4,614,243.16	\$3,523,623.11	\$1,090,620.05
Franklin Telephone - Meadville (Rescoped)	\$97,047.90	\$87,989.43	\$9,058.47
State of MS (Administrative Expenditures)	\$1,072,336.63	\$768,035.68	\$304,300.95
Swyft Connect - Collins	\$1,754,999.95	\$1,335,289.69	\$419,710.26
Swyft Connect - Poplarville (Rescoped)	\$2,299,729.00	\$0.00	\$2,299,729.00
UpLink LLC - Clack (Rescoped)	\$1,044,064.32	\$582,096.93	\$461,967.39
UpLink LLC - Coahoma County	\$4,811,132.61	\$4,798,703.76	\$12,428.85
UpLink LLC - Fish Camp (Rescoped)	\$540,742.94	\$236,013.46	\$304,729.48
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32,696,322.55</b>	<b>\$21,183,108.62</b>	<b>\$11,513,213.93</b>

**\$21,183,108.62**

Reimbursed / Paid to Date

**\$32,696,322.55**

Total Federal Award Amount



# CAPITAL PROJECTS

## FUND (CPF)

BEAM made over \$150 Million in preliminary and final determinations for the Capital Projects Fund (CPF), a broadband expansion grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Treasury and funded by ARPA funds. Mississippi was awarded \$162M with the majority of funding going toward large-scale infrastructure projects and a smaller amount earmarked for Public Wi-Fi projects. The U.S. Department of Treasury guidance requires all CPF funds to be spent by December 31, 2026.

### BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

**ROUND 1:** In the first round of applications, BEAM built an application portal and received 157 applications requesting \$559.3 Million in grant funding, which greatly exceeded the available funding. Those applications were reviewed and scored, preliminary determinations put through the 30-day statutory comment and objection period, and 37 projects approved. These 37 projects, including location and number of households served, are detailed in the chart and map on the following pages titled “CPF Broadband Infrastructure Awards - Round 1.”

**ROUND 2:** After the first round of broadband infrastructure awards were finalized, approximately \$30.7 Million remained for available awards. BEAM accepted a second round of applications in fall 2024 and received 51 applications totaling \$132M. A chart of these awards titled “CPF Broadband Infrastructure - Round 2 (Preliminary Determinations)” is available on page 12.

Round 2 applications were reviewed and scored in the same manner as Round 1, and BEAM has announced preliminary determinations for 12 projects totaling \$30.5 Million. Once announced, Mississippi Code

§ 77-19-15(2) requires all preliminary awards and a shapefile of the awarded areas to be posted publicly with a 30-day period for comments or objections. BEAM is accepting comments and objections during a period which began on November 22 and will end on December 23, 2024; all will be investigated as appropriate before awards are finalized.

### PUBLIC WI-FI PROJECTS

A smaller CPF category will fund public wi-fi projects (approximately \$3M). Applicants must prioritize areas in Mississippi that are economically disadvantaged. Cities and towns must partner with internet service providers to apply for these funding opportunities. The goal of this program is to create public spaces (such as downtowns, parks, volunteer fire stations, etc.) for individuals to access free Wi-Fi to be utilized for school, telehealth, or other uses.

**ROUND 1:** BEAM received five applications totaling approximately \$327,000. After the statutory comment and objection period all five were approved. A full listing of these projects can be found later in this section. Please see Chart on the following pages titled “CPF Public Wi-Fi Awards – Round 1.”

**ROUND 2:** BEAM received seven applications totaling approximately \$551,000. These projects have recently undergone the statutory comment and objection period, which began on November 1 and ended on December 1, 2024. BEAM is now reviewing these comments and objections before finalizing awards. Please see the charts on the following pages titled “CPF Public Wi-Fi Awards – Round 2 (Preliminary Determinations).”



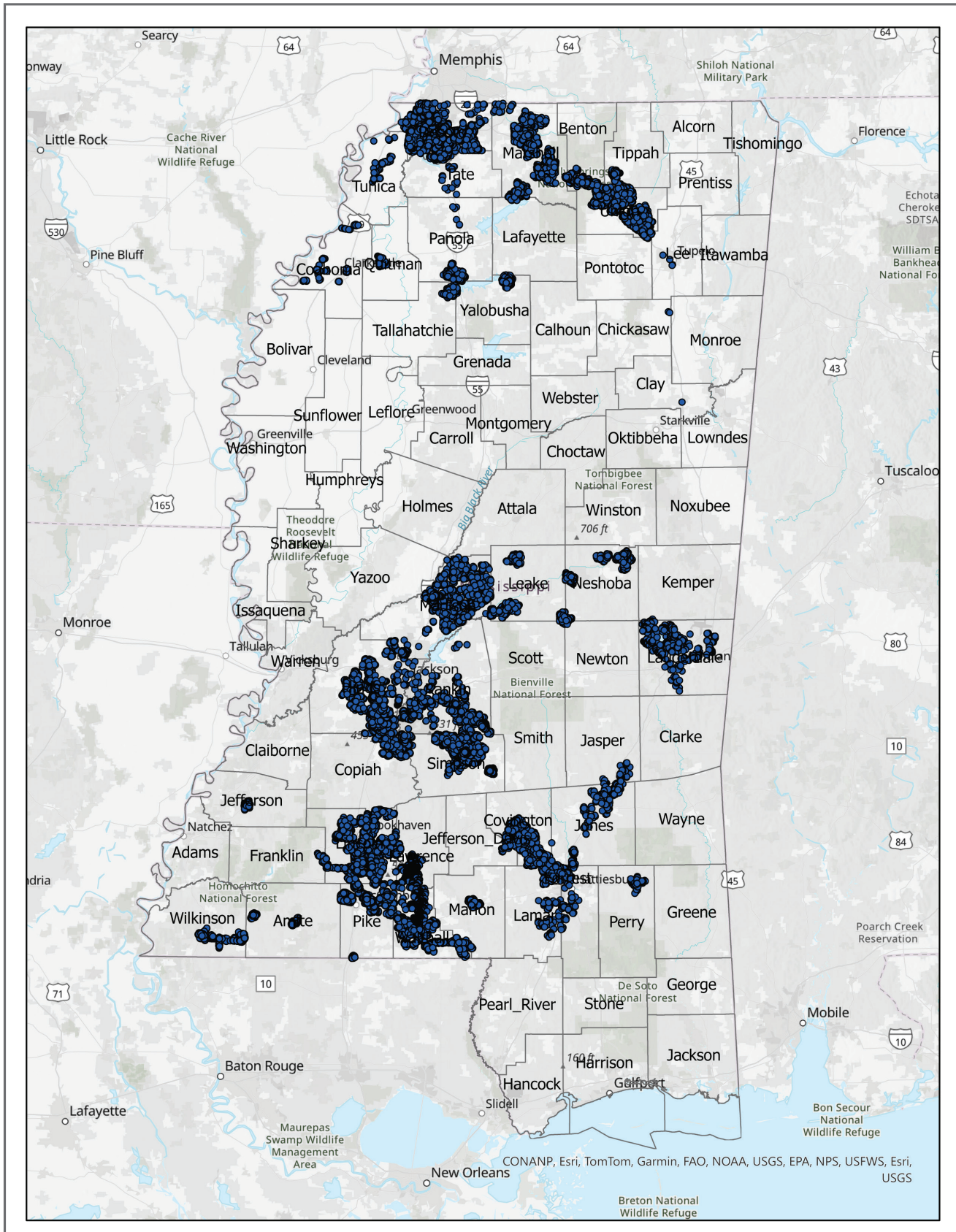
## CPF Broadband Infrastructure Awards – Round 1

As referenced on page 9.

PROVIDER	AWARD \$	# HOUSEHOLDS	AREA DESCRIPTION
4 County Fiber	\$1.2M	375	Ackerman
ACE Fiber	\$1.6M	809	SE Union Co./Blue Springs
ACE Fiber	\$2.1M	618	Potts Camp to Myrtle
ACE Fiber	\$1.6M	509	Blue Mountain to New Albany
AT&T	\$1.6M	1,211	NW Desoto Co/ Walls
AT&T	\$869,000	588	East of Arkabutla Lake
AT&T	\$1M	495	West of Arkabutla Lake
AT&T	\$2.25M	796	West of Raymond/Oakley/Seven Springs
AT&T	\$1.2M	874	Sebastopol/Conway/Bertice
AT&T	\$3M	1,617	Mahon/Waites/Laws Hill
AT&T	\$1.3M	690	Burnside/Bond/NE Neshoba Co.
AT&T	\$3.1M	715	SE Rankin Co./NW of Pucket
Comcast	\$4.9M	3,296	Central Madison County
Comcast	\$4.5M	1,584	South Central Hinds/NE Copiah Co.
Comcast	\$6.2M	2,608	SE Rankin/ NE Simpson Counties
Comcast	\$148,000	1,477	Line Extension – Jackson/Pinebelt
Conexon	\$1.56M	840	East Lincoln/Enterprise/Heuck's Retreat
Conexon	\$2.7M	657	SW Lincoln/Bogue Chitto/Ruth
Conexon	\$3.2M	992	SW Lawrence/Walthall Counties
Conexon	\$3.1M	857	Pricedale/Tylertown/Dexter
CSpire	\$2.9M	1,660	Pucket/Magee/Mendenhall/Madison
CSpire	\$2.25M	838	South of Horn Lake & Olive Branch
CSpire	\$5M	1,289	East of Terry
CSpire	\$1.1M	287	East Hinds Co./Raymond
CSpire	\$4.3M	956	South Hinds Co./Terry/Bolton
CSpire	\$1.4M	731	Pinebelt Area
CSpire	\$4.1M	3,205	Columbia/Summit/Osyka/Liberty/Gloster
CSpire	\$4M	815	Tate/Noxubee County
DE Fastlink	\$5M	3,910	Richton/Sandersville/East of Seminary
Franklin Telephone	\$3.9M	1,023	NE Lincoln/Loyd Star
Singing River Connect	\$1M	558	Joe Batt
Singing River Connect	\$4.1M	1,539	Kittrell
SwyftConnect	\$2.6M	984	Fayette
SwyftConnect	\$4.9M	1,390	Woodville to Centerville
Tallahatchie Valley EPA	\$3.8M	811	NE Yalobusha County/ Water Valley
Uplink, LLC	\$1.4M	102	Coahoma/Tunic Counties line extension
Uplink, LLC	\$786,000	125	Quitman County west of Marks



As referenced on page 9.





### CPF Broadband Infrastructure – Round 2 (Preliminary Determinations)

As referenced on page 9.

PROVIDER	AWARD \$	# HOUSEHOLDS	AREA DESCRIPTION
Bruce Telephone Company	\$1.4M	106	Calhoun Line Extension
CSpire	\$490,107	335	Hinds County
CSpire	\$2.4M	656	Lamar County
CSpire	\$2.4M	502	Tate County
SwyftConnect	\$3.5M	493	Amite County
Tallahatchie Valley Electric Power Association	\$3.2M	732	Panola County
Tallahatchie Valley Electric Power Association	\$4.9M	1,073	Tate County
TEC	\$1.8M	558	Louin & Montrose
TEC	\$2.3M	1,111	Lawrence County
TEC	\$5M	2,933	Scott & Leake County
We Connect	\$1.6M	145	Buckhorn Line Extension

### CPF Public Wi-Fi Awards – Round 1

As referenced on page 9.

PROVIDER	COUNTY	PUBLIC ACCESS POINT LOCATIONS	AWARD \$
Aristotle Unified Communications	Tunica	3 access points (Tunica River Park)	\$12,979
Aristotle Unified Communications	Tunica	3 access points (Tunica Expo Center)	\$40,977
Mound Bayou Telephone Company	Bolivar	5 access points (Housing Authority, Health Center, etc.)	\$159,835
Tombigbee Fiber	Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Union	65 access points (volunteer fire departments and community centers)	\$79,752
Vicksburg Video	Warren	7 access points (Vicksburg city parks and community garden)	\$33,500

### CPF Public Wi-Fi Awards – Round 2 (Preliminary Determinations)

As referenced on page 9.

PROVIDER	COUNTY	PUBLIC ACCESS POINT LOCATIONS	AWARD \$
Aristotle Unified Communications	Yazoo	3 access points (Bentonia)	\$252,162
MaxxSouth Broadband	Lafayette	2 access points (Oxford Aventura Park)	\$27,513
MaxxSouth Broadband	Lafayette	10 access points (Oxford Square)	\$152,272
MaxxSouth Broadband	Tippah	2 access points (Ripley Downtown)	\$50,888
MaxxSouth Broadband	Oktibbeha	2 access points (Starkville Downtown)	\$32,091
Tombigbee Fiber	Lee, Pontotoc	12 access points (city parks, recreational fields)	\$24,923
Vicksburg Video	Warren	2 access points (Vicksburg-Halls Ferry Park)	\$11,545



# BROADBAND

# EQUITY, ACCESS, AND

# DEPLOYMENT (BEAD)

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) requires Mississippi to connect every remaining household without access to high-speed internet. This program is BEAM's largest funding source (\$1.2 billion allocated for Mississippi) and stems from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

For the last two years, BEAM and all state broadband offices across the nation have been working through the steps required to release this funding. Mississippi submitted its required five-year plan and an extensive Initial Proposal detailing how that funding would be used. These documents were subject to approval by NTIA and included the structure and activities of the state broadband office (BEAM), current and projected funding sources, data collection strategies, partnerships, alignment with other state agencies, stakeholder engagement strategies, identification of barriers and obstacles to service, key implementation strategies, expected costs, a timeline for universal service, a challenge process, and the methodology for subgrantee selection for funding. All of these resources are posted on [www.beam.ms.gov/bead](http://www.beam.ms.gov/bead).

The BEAD grant requires the state to fund infrastructure projects to reach all unserved locations (speeds of less than 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload) and underserved locations (speeds of less than 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload). If funding for these locations is demonstrated, gigabit service to community anchor institutions may also be provided.

The BEAD funding cannot be used to supplement or duplicate existing federal broadband funding, so all awards are subject to a deduplication process to prohibit wasteful spending. The scoring rubric to award the funding focuses on minimum program outlay to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used as efficiently as possible.

Below is a brief recap of the tasks BEAM has already completed for BEAD, as well as an anticipated timeline for upcoming tasks related to BEAD.

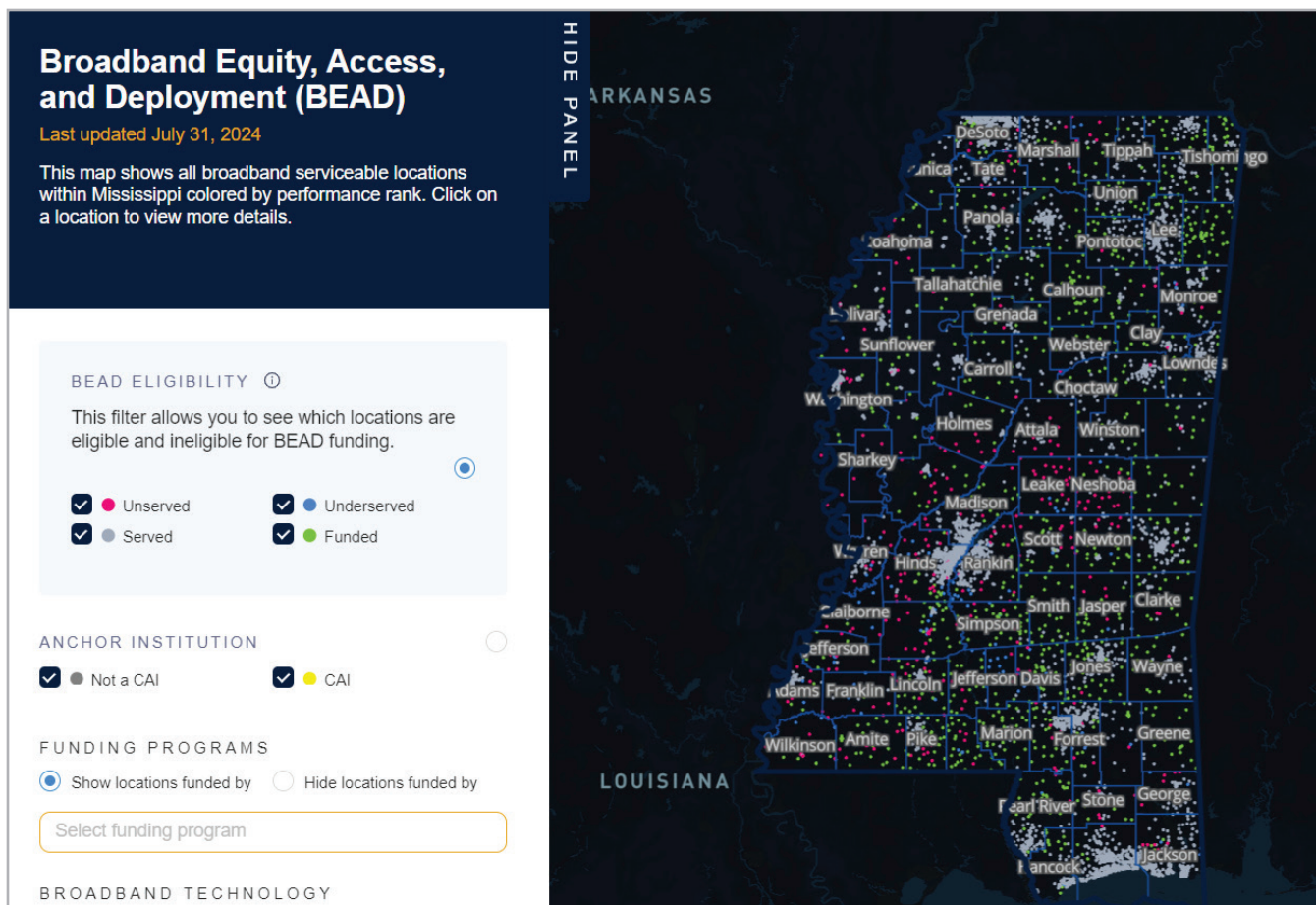
## COMPLETED BEAD OBJECTIVES:

### MAPPING MISSISSIPPI BROADBAND AVAILABILITY

BEAD requirements state that the state broadband office (BEAM) must create an address-level map of broadband availability and awarded federal funding for broadband expansion. BEAM now hosts one of the most detailed maps of Mississippi addresses with numerous filters to show speeds, technology, service providers, and funding programs. This detailed Mississippi map was recognized as one of the most transparent efforts by the AEI Federal Broadband Subsidies Report Card. The map is easily accessible to the public for review at the agency website [www.broadbandms.com/beadmap](http://www.broadbandms.com/beadmap). BEAM will use this map to determine which locations are still in need of high-speed internet and thus eligible for funding under the BEAD program.

(Map of broadband servicable locations on next page.)





## MISSISSIPPI'S “5-YEAR PLAN”

The “5-Year Plan” includes strategies and variables that will necessarily change throughout BEAD implementation. The plan catalogues previous broadband funding provided to the state, community and stakeholder engagement, partnerships, resiliency efforts, and a plan for universal service. After a period of public comment, the plan was submitted to NTIA and approved in 2023. BEAM anticipates updating the plan as new information becomes available.

## INITIAL PROPOSAL VOLUME 1

The “Initial Proposal Volume 1” is a technical document that primarily includes a listing of unserved or underserved households, community anchor institutions, and existing federal funding sources for broadband expansion and access in Mississippi. After a period of public comment, “Volume 1” was submitted to NTIA and approved. “Volume 1” also required Mississippi to develop a plan to conduct a fair and transparent challenge process. This challenge process began on August 1, 2024, and closed approximately 45

days thereafter. BEAM procured an independent firm to adjudicate all challenges submitted. These challenge results have been submitted to NTIA for review and are awaiting final approval.

## INITIAL PROPOSAL VOLUME 2

The “Initial Proposal Volume 2” details the process and scoring that Mississippi will use in subgrantee selection, along with additional requirements and certifications required by NTIA. After a period of public comment, “Volume 2” was submitted and approved by NTIA.

## CHALLENGE PROCESS

The Challenge Process provided an opportunity for service providers, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to challenge the service availability as reflected on the Mississippi Broadband Map. The majority of the challenge rules and processes were mandated by NTIA. The challenge process results will allow BEAM to update the Mississippi Broadband Map to make final determinations as to what locations are eligible for funding under the BEAD program.

The first phase of the Challenge Process allowed residents to submit evidence (such as a speed test) to prove their homes did not have available high-speed internet access. BEAM contracted with the ten planning and development districts across the state to assist the public and local governments in this effort. Local units of government, internet service providers, and nonprofits were then able to submit this evidence from the public as an official challenge. This portion of the Challenge Process was open from August 1 – September 4, 2024.

After initial challenges were submitted, a Rebuttal Period opened for internet service providers to have an opportunity to provide counter-evidence for any challenges submitted against their service. This period of the Challenge Process lasted from September 18 – October 7, 2024.

Once the Rebuttal Period ended, the Final Determination phase began. BEAM issued a Request for Proposals and contracted with Michael Baker International to adjudicate these challenges. Once NTIA reviews the challenges, all NTIA approved challenges will be used to update the state broadband map before BEAM opens applications for BEAD funding.

Full details of the Challenge Process are laid out in the “Initial Proposal Volume 1” and the “Challenge Resource Guide” that are both available on [www.beam.ms.gov/bead](http://www.beam.ms.gov/bead).



## UPCOMING BEAD OBJECTIVES:

### LETTER OF INTENT PROCESS

Prior to the opening of the BEAD application period, internet service providers must participate in a Letter of Intent Process. This process will help BEAM to streamline application reviews once BEAD applications are open. The Letter of Intent process opened on November 18, 2024, and will close on December 13, 2024. This process is contained solely in the BEAM grant portal and requires data proving eligibility through financial and other required documentation.

The LOI process will also serve as a tool to finalize BEAD project areas. BEAM has subdivided the remaining unserved and underserved locations in the state so that an application area would encompass the target number of broadband serviceable locations, with additional consideration given to the overall coverage in square miles and the potential span of fiber routes, geographic barriers, and projected costs for the project. Through the LOI process BEAM will gain valuable information from providers to more fully understand areas that may be left with no BEAD applications. Those areas will either be redrawn to be included in a contiguous project area, or declared a high cost location that may be served with alternative technology (fixed wireless or low earth orbit satellite).

A “Letter of Intent Guide” for providers is available on [www.beam.ms.gov/bead](http://www.beam.ms.gov/bead). This guide includes the list of questions and other information providers are required to submit in this process. The LOI process is MANDATORY for participation in the BEAD application process.

### APPLICATION PROCESS

BEAM anticipates opening applications for BEAD in January 2025. The application period will last for 60 days, and providers must meet all the following requirements for eligibility:

1. Complete a Letter of Intent;
2. Meet mandated financial requirements;
3. Meet mandated organizational requirements, including ownership;





BEAM hosted meetings with all 10 Planning and Development Districts across the state. Pictured: Sally Doty addresses the Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District.

4. Propose a project that will provide at least 100/20 Mbps service to all locations within the service area within the required timeline; AND
5. Certify ability to comply with all applicable requirements mandated by NTIA, 2 CFR 200 Uniform Guidance, and the State of Mississippi.

## FINAL PROPOSAL

NTIA requires BEAM to submit a final proposal for BEAD by August of 2025. This final proposal will include the results of the subgrantee selection process for approval by NTIA. BEAM anticipates submitting this proposal in mid-June of 2025. Once the final proposal is approved, BEAM will finalize grant agreements with all subgrantees, define milestones for each project, and monitor awardees through planning, permitting, and construction of the grant funded projects.

## BEAD TENTATIVE TIMELINE





# DIGITAL SKILLS & ACCESSIBILITY DAS

The Digital Skills & Accessibility (DSA) program is also provided by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and is intended to complement the BEAD program previously discussed. Just as BEAM created the “5-Year Plan” for BEAD, the agency did the same for the Digital Skills & Accessibility program. “The Digital Skills & Accessibility Plan” has been completed and approved by NTIA. BEAM posted this plan for public comment from January 5 – February 5, 2024, and comments were incorporated as appropriate. After several rounds of curing, the final version was approved by NTIA on April 10, 2024. All versions of this document are available on [www.beam.ms.gov/digital-skills-accessibility](http://www.beam.ms.gov/digital-skills-accessibility).

This plan is a key factor for broadband expansion as many individuals will soon have access to high-speed internet for the first time. Whether service is built through BEAD or one of the other broadband funding sources, the DSA Plan is focused on making sure residents have the digital skills and other necessities to embrace the full potential of all the internet has to offer. The NTIA has given a list of eight covered populations that BEAM must incorporate into the DSA Plan. These covered populations are as follows: individuals who live in households that earn less than 150% of the Federal Poverty level, aging individuals (ages 60+), incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals who have a disability, individuals with a language barrier (including low-literacy and English learners), individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority, and individuals who primarily live in rural areas. In total, this includes approximately 93% of Mississippi’s population.

The overarching objective of BEAM’s Digital Skills and Accessibility Plan is to ensure that every Mississippian has access to affordable high-speed internet and the necessary skills training, thus effectively bridging the digital divide. This objective will be met over the coming years as funding for the Digital Skills & Accessibility Program is made available to every state. NTIA has allocated an initial \$10.7 Million for the state of Mississippi to fund programs for digital skills training over the next five years. BEAM submitted a plan

Angela Bennett: NTIA Director of Digital Equity, Angela Thi Bennett addresses a group of Mississippi state agencies regarding the importance of digital skills in a digital world.





DSA-Wi-Fi bus: Don Green in Clarksdale invited BEAM staff to learn more about the Technology Bus Program in Coahoma County and surrounding areas. This mobile bus provides tutorial sessions guided by certified teachers to empower students. This program also provides approximately 60 bags of fruits and vegetables to families with at least three children utilizing the bus for learning. Pictured l-r: Kaylan Harris, BEAM DSA Analyst; Symone Bounds, BEAM DSA Analyst; Don Green, Technology Bus Program and Mississippi Delta Council for Farm Workers Opportunities; Sally Doty, Director of BEAM.

for the use of this funding by the deadline of May 28, 2024. BEAM has gone through several rounds of initial curing with NTIA and is currently awaiting two rounds of federal approvals to access these funds.

Once final approval from NTIA is given, BEAM will take applications for the first round of digital skills and accessibility funds. BEAM estimates that applications will open in the first quarter of 2025. In the meantime, BEAM will continue meeting with community partners, state organizations, and others regarding the proposed efforts as submitted in the proposed application.

As part of this program, BEAM has partnered with American Connection Corps (ACC) to have nine members stationed around the state to provide digital skills training to individuals in the community. Each member has been assigned approximately six to eight counties to provide services including digital literacy training, establishing telehealth zones, and working with Volunteer Mississippi to celebrate National Days of Service. Most of these individuals will be stationed at Mississippi State Extension Offices in local communities. Those interested in this service can email [beamoffice@dsacoach.com](mailto:beamoffice@dsacoach.com). Please visit [www.beam.ms.gov](http://www.beam.ms.gov) for more details.

[www.beam.ms.gov](http://www.beam.ms.gov) for more details.

Additionally, BEAM is actively developing the “Mississippi State Digital Asset Map,” a tool designed to centralize access to digital resources across the state. Once launched, this map will be a resource for residents to locate public digital assets, such as Wi-Fi hotspots, computers and printers, digital devices, as well as information about local programming, workshops, and digital literacy events. Structured to function similarly to Google Maps, the Digital Asset Map will allow users to easily identify nearby resources, enhancing accessibility and connectivity within Mississippi’s communities.

While the Digital Asset Map is still in progress, BEAM’s ongoing efforts to compile and map these assets represent a crucial step toward a more connected Mississippi. Upon completion, the Digital Asset Map will serve as a vital tool for residents and community organizations alike, empowering Mississippians to fully participate in the digital world.





DSA- Hinds workforce meeting: Internet providers in the metro-Jackson area meeting with workforce development staff at Hinds Community College. Similar meetings were held at each community college in the state.



DSA panel: BEAM was invited to speak on a panel regarding Digital Skills & Accessibility for Incarcerated Learners. Pictured (l-r): Audrey McAfee, Mississippi Department of Corrections; Symone Bounds, BEAM; Jason Zuehlke, Mississippi Delta Community College; Michelle Baragona, North East Mississippi Community College.





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

All the grants that BEAM oversees have one thing in common: Community Engagement.

BEAM's community engagement meetings have taken a variety of forms and, in approximately two and a half years, the agency has attended approximately 250 community engagement activities.

These meetings are generally held in community centers, churches, school cafeterias, or other similar venues. Nearly all these meetings were hosted by local officials (state legislators, neighborhood associations, mayors, etc.), and BEAM worked in conjunction with some of these officials to assist with planning and logistics. At these events, BEAM generally discussed all the grants listed in this report, demonstrated how to utilize the State Broadband Map, and took questions from the crowd. These meetings were all open to the public.

During January and February of 2024, BEAM conducted a statewide tour to fulfill outreach requirements of the BEAD program. BEAM conducted meetings in partnership with each of the 10 Planning and Development Districts across the state to engage with local governments and prepare for the Challenge Process. BEAM also met numerous times with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to discuss existing and future connectivity.

BEAM's Deputy Director Kyle Brown addresses Senatobia Rotary Club – January 2024.



# “I don’t like no fancy chords. Just the boogie.”

–John Lee Hooker



Director Sally Doty presents at a Community Meeting in Marks, MS – January 2023.

BEAM personnel have attended numerous conferences and summits, often to speak, sometimes to listen and learn, and sometimes both. These conferences and summits include events hosted by NTIA for state broadband offices, Mississippi Digital Government Summits, Mississippi Municipal League Conferences, and other conferences with a broadband focus.

Additionally BEAM has provided speakers for Kiwanis and Rotary Club meetings, attended groundbreaking events, Technology Board meetings, Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy meetings, GIS Council meetings, and more.

Finally, the Digital Skills & Accessibility grant requires community engagements specifically related to the DSA program. BEAM organized and hosted DSA Advisory Committee meetings, meetings with the Institutions of Higher Learning and Community College Board, tours of digital skills training program facilities, meetings with agencies who serve the DSA covered populations, and more. For more information on the DSA program please refer to pages 17-19 in this report or visit [www.beam.ms.gov/digital-skills-accessibility](http://www.beam.ms.gov/digital-skills-accessibility).



Sally Doty speaks to the crowd in Pocahontas – October 2022.



Community Meeting in Cleveland, MS – October 2022.





HORNE Ridgeland, MS Office

As you may imagine, a state agency managing four federal grants must maintain a significant amount of reporting and compliance. It gets even more intensive when you realize the total dollar amount of these grants being overseen by the BEAM office is just shy of \$1.5 billion. With all eyes on the BEAM office to administer these funds through four grants with different rules, regulations, and reporting requirements, BEAM works closely with HORNE, LLP to make all these things a reality.

HORNE is generally well known in the state, as its headquarters are in Ridgeland, MS - just a short drive from the State Capital. For those who may be unfamiliar, HORNE is a skilled firm that assists their clients tackling financial, regulatory, and operational challenges. Whether it's managing federal programs, ensuring compliance, or improving business performance, they can provide tailored, innovative solutions that deliver results.

Specifically for BEAM, HORNE serves as the program manager for BEAM's four funding streams: BEAD (more information on page 15), CPF (more on page 11), BIP (more on page 6), and DSA (more on page 19). HORNE plays a vital role in overseeing the full grant life cycle, from application intake to closeout. The firm supports BEAM by conducting application reviews, performing risk and financial assessment, as well as other duties such as federal and state reporting, project management for subawards, and ensuring compliance across all programs.

With clients across a variety of sectors, HORNE's experience is varied in such a way that the firm is a large asset to BEAM as all the broadband programs are still

new, and rules and regulations are still being written at the Federal just a few months before being passed to the states. HORNE plays a particularly unique role with the BEAM office not only because of their varied skills and knowledge, but also because of the unprecedented amount of federal funds being administered for broadband expansion. BEAM and HORNE collaborate daily to ensure effective use of these federal dollars while driving forward-thinking solutions to support the programs' long-term success.

HORNE has also experienced some notable achievements throughout its work with BEAM, including a plan to monitor BEAM's BIP grant that received such high praise from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), that it was suggested that HORNE assist other states in adopting this model. Overall, the HORNE staff is highly skilled in assisting the BEAM team maintain records and preparing for desk reviews for each of the federal grants that BEAM is required to do; the staff is always prepared to assist BEAM to find solutions to any issues that arise while administering the approximately \$1.5 billion in grant funds.

The strong collaborative environment fostered between BEAM and HORNE has allowed for a smooth process throughout the life cycle of each of the grants so far. Both parties are looking forward to our continued partnership, and the future achievements as we work together to ensure that the entire state of Mississippi has access to high-speed internet.





In the earliest days of BEAM, it became apparent that mapping broadband in Mississippi was about to change on a massive scale. In essence, broadband availability maps were only reported at the Census block level which led to many issues. If one home in a Census block was reported to have service, the map would reflect all homes in that Census block as having available service, regardless of whether that was accurate or not.

To prepare for BEAD, Mississippi was required to map service availability down to the address level, meaning BEAM would know which homes did or did not have service. To make this happen, BEAM contracted Ready.net to help create a user-friendly map for the BEAM office, the public, and internet service providers to use.

A large part of the partnership between BEAM and Ready has been a learning experience as Ready has tailored much of its software based on the work it has done with BEAM, refining its tools to handle the specific demands of government-led broadband funding initiatives. By streamlining tasks such as application processing, performance testing, and surveying, Ready's solutions have so far enabled BEAM to manage the complexities of grant distribution securely and efficiently. Through this work, Ready has played a key role in helping Mississippi improve connectivity and expand access for its residents.

Ready is particularly proud of launching its first challenge process, performance testing, survey tools, and application module for Mississippi, all of which have been essential as BEAM has awarded Capital Projects Fund, and in preparing for BEAD and Digital

Skills and Accessibility funding to be awarded to the state.

Saying that Ready is a mapping and data collection company is not doing the company justice - Ready is a public benefit corporation that develops software to streamline grant distribution, helping their customers to allocate funds more effectively to increase access to affordable resources. Working primarily with state broadband offices across nearly 28 states, as well as consulting groups, internet service providers, and utility partners, Ready offers tailored solutions designed to support the software needs of state broadband offices and other utility frameworks.

As Ready moves forward in preparation of BEAD and other grant programs, the anticipated launch of its Reporting and Compliance module promises to automate additional processes, further enhancing operational productivity for offices across the country. With its commitment to high-quality software as a service, Ready is dedicated to enhancing quality of life across America and beyond by supporting broadband expansion and better resource access, and BEAM is proud to have a partnership with this innovative company with such specialty for the road ahead.

Above Picture: Ready.net staff and BEAM visit Medgar Evers Library in Jackson to learn more about digital skills training in the Jackson Hinds Library System. Pictured (l-r): Seolha Lee, Ready; Maryanne Wachter, Ready; Clayton Wooley, Ready; Logan Card, Ready; Kaylan Harris, BEAM; James Hampton, Medgar Evers Library; Symone Bounds, BEAM; and Anne Sanders, Medgar Evers Library.

